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**Emergency Planning and Preparedness: Federal, State, and Local Coordination**  
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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

**Introduction**

Thank you, Chairman Reichert, and Ranking Member Pascrell for allowing me to provide you with a statement for the record on Emergency Planning and Preparedness: Federal, State and Local Coordination. I'll try to highlight key issues that I believe need to be raised as part of the national discussion about the state of our preparedness.

Washington State's all-hazards management system predates 9/11 by several decades, including a statewide Homeland Security stratagem that predates 9/11 by 2 full years. Our system incorporates a broad public /private representation on a statutorily created Emergency Management Council and a statewide Homeland Security Committee (each of which meets every 60 days. These groups liaise with the Governor's Domestic Security Executive Group (comprised mostly of senior cabinet level public safety officials) which meets on a weekly basis, advising the Governor on the state's disaster readiness and on state wide disaster issues ranging from tsunami preparedness to homeland security grant programs involving local, state and private sector participants. It is this system that develops and tracks the State's Homeland Security Strategic Plan, which is truly an all hazards document. The Strategic Plan is the foundation of Team Washington's enterprise approach to disaster preparedness.

**Status of intergovernmental collaboration**

We have excellent working relationships with our local colleagues within the state. That is not to claim we concur in all things, nor is it to suggest interactions are smooth all of the time. Interactions are unfailingly honest, and this has been helpful during emergency situations, as well as in resolving difficult day to day issues. We have taken the time to develop mutual respect for the professional capabilities and challenges each government level encounters. With our regional federal colleagues, I can say that we have an excellent relationship as well, but miss the days when they were our link to the federal decision making process. We trust them, they know us, but they are often cut out of the dialogue by their own command chain.

**Interoperability**

Interoperability is one of the most recurrent themes in any credible analysis of an effective and robust emergency management system. The State of Washington has a State Interoperability Executive Committee established by the Legislature, to address this issue. Although technological and administrative challenges, and long term financing issues for state wide interoperability, are very real, it remains our primary focus to support first responders, assuring that a deputy sheriff from one county can communicate at an incident effectively with a fire commander from the neighboring county without missing a beat. Interoperability is as much a management as a technological term –there must be willingness at all levels to coordinate, collaborate and cooperate.

We are also enhancing our logistical capability, first coordinating more effectively within the Military Department between the resources of the Emergency Management Division and the

National Guard, and branching out this past year to work with local logistics planners to devise a seamless exchange of information about available resources.

### **State and Local Planning and Coordination Capability**

Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) are the federal “match” for state and local investments in emergency mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Although EMPG is based on a 50/50 match (50 % federal to 50% state/local), the reality is that state and local governments are carrying these burdens at an 80/20 ratio. It is a cruel myth that states and locals are simply waiting for federal dollars before initiating their own efforts.

Ironically, EMPG is the only DHS grant program that requires any match at all of states and locals, and yet instead of leveraging the local –state investment, the DHS strategy has been to inflict death by “1000 cuts” on the one program that provides the best chance to prepare communities to respond in any type of disaster. This flies in the face of any reasonable assessment of what must be done to assure that local and state planning and coordination is enhanced.

### **Impediments to Disaster Response in a Presidential Declaration of Emergency**

DHS still lacks emergency management expertise. The federal performance we have seen in exercises and real time events and the policies we must endure suggests that the next major emergency response may be aggravated rather than alleviated by DHS.

On a daily basis, decisions are made by DHS about deadlines and program application requirements that impose an unnecessary burden on an already overwhelmed local and state emergency management infrastructure. And, DHS has difficulty in meeting its own deadlines for providing information so grant applications can be completed.

During a disaster, I cannot be certain that federal disaster assistance will be provided in a timely manner, nor that the federal assistance DHS/FEMA provides will be what I need, when I need it. I can’t be certain that my Region 10 federal counterpart, in whom I have great confidence, will be kept in the loop of information, even when he serves as the Federal Coordinating Officer. This means that in our next disaster I may be devoting time to damage control from the effects of the federal “effort” rather than focus on victims, which would be my preference.

Post Katrina, states must be prepared to work to preserve federal commitments to assist victims. There exists the distinct possibility that DHS may renege on commitments, and parse the words of written assurances.

The Katrina experience was merely another milestone in the continuing degradation of the nation’s capacity to mitigate, prepare, respond and recover with respect to disasters. We in emergency management have seen this condition unfold over the past several years. FEMA isn’t FEMA any more.

### **Our Katrina**

Our “Katrina” is most likely a major earthquake. That’s why mitigation and preparedness efforts have taken hold in our state: since we won’t have four days to observe our disaster approaching, those things that we do to offset consequences and ready our citizens are of critical importance.

### **Coastal Communities**

In one version of a Katrina style event, a subduction zone quake could create a tsunami threat within 25 minutes for our coastal communities.

We are implementing a coordinated warning system for coastal communities for tsunami. This will include public education workshops, training and exercises.

### **Evacuation**

We do have evacuation plans to support moving people quickly away from an approaching lahar or a tsunami. We in this state must improve our ability to care for a sizable number of citizens when they must move away from a dangerous environment.

### **Seattle Fault**

A major quake along the Seattle Fault could trigger significant injuries or loss of life. We would see significant damage to the transportation and commerce networks in our state. No part of our economy will be unscathed.

### **Immediate Future**

None of these vulnerabilities is a surprise. A great deal of cooperative work has positioned Washington State to respond effectively, but clearly the momentum and the collaboration needs to continue. We need to continue to build on our partnerships with local government and the private sector, because for a considerable time after our earthquake we can expect to be on our own. A major commitment of EMPG beyond the annual levels we have seen would be an extremely hopeful development, if it were to be administered by emergency management professionals, minus the constraining influence that characterizes the Homeland Security Grant Program.

We will be stronger if/when DHS/FEMA rights itself, but even if that happens some day, we know that we have our own work to do here. With increased planning exercise and training support, we can make great strides to improve the overall capacity of local and state government. We will carry our share of the burden.

We also need to continue to reach out to DHS and FEMA. We should not just complain – we must keep offering our participation and our advice to help fix the problems we have identified. Mere consultation will not be sufficient: a true partnership allows debate, discussion and the merging of expertise before deadlines are established, and before policies become etched in stone. We look forward to any such exchange.

None of these issues are unique to my state. However, because of the demolition of the existing national emergency management structure with little analysis or consultation, we will need in time to restore a national program, managed by professionals, and possessing the necessary

authority and expertise to recognize those positive contributions the DHS model has made, while restoring and enhancing what has been the FEMA mission until recently. It can be done, but it must be done by the professional emergency management community and its public safety partners.

Thank you.

**Note: while the issues below were not covered specifically in my oral presentation, I am prepared to discuss these with the Committee at any time.**

### **Some Additional Thoughts**

- **EMAC:** Nationally, we need to continue to foster the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) which in a state to state exchange sent more than 65000 civilian and National Guard personnel to the Gulf States. This system proved adaptable and flexible, and after action efforts will make the program even stronger in its next deployment mission.
- **Federalization:** Any attempt by any Administration to “federalize” a disaster response should be met with opposition from all quarters. This is a constitutional issue and it is uniquely American to insist that the state’s governors control efforts within their own states.
- **Public Education:** People in our state in earthquake hazard areas must be trained to drop, cover and hold, and to move to higher ground as soon as they can in tsunami prone areas. Similarly, given the frequency and history of disasters in various parts of Washington State, the particular emphasis on a hazard, and thus the protective measures the public must be schooled in, may differ. Fires, floods, lahars each have characteristics and protective or defensive measures to be conveyed. The emergency management community is uniquely qualified to present public education for all hazards disaster preparedness, and this is delivered best by local officials at the local government level, anywhere in the country, for any type of hazard that a community may face.

State and federal assistance and support is important, but it cannot be a controlling form of support. Washington State is developing a state wide public education strategy that can be tailored to any jurisdiction in the state, and will provide materials and technical assistance to communities. The State will work within the state government family to convey appropriate messaging that will enhance the prospects of key state personnel to be able to respond quickly with a high level of assurance that their own families are protected.

- **Exercises:** A collaborative effort is underway, coordinated by State EMD, but with the indispensable participation of our local colleagues, to try to establish a rational exercise regime for the state of Washington. Exercises, to be effective, must be designed carefully, implemented appropriately, critiqued thoroughly and unflinchingly, and followed up resolutely to correct any gaps or deficiencies. If the TOPOFF 2 exercise in 2003 achieved anything at all in our state, it solidified relationships and built trust among a variety of disciplines that is invaluable in these times. The exercise protocols will enable us to develop capability within the State, and will ultimately facilitate expansion to inter state exercises, and even across our international border with Canada as the 2010 Olympics approaches.

